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Briefing Notes on Soviet 20th Party Congress

- I. The flood of rhetoric from Moscow in the past two weeks (14-25 February) has been most enlightening about Soviet policy and Soviet policy makers. The 20th Party Congress gives the clearest definition we have had of recent trends in Soviet affairs. These trends began to emerge about the time of Stalin's death, became more definite with the purge of Beria, but became crystal-clear only in the past year--since Malenkov's demotion and Khrushchev's rise to his "first among equals" position in the top circle of Soviet leaders.
- II. Party First Secretary Khrushchev dominated the Congress: his 8-hour, 50,000-word political report took up the whole of the Congress' opening day; his revision of two important Communist doctrines was a solid demonstration of authority.
- III. All the words poured forth at this Party Congress, viewed in the light of Soviet actions and the history of Communism, add up to the simple fact that the present collective leadership, headed by Khrushchev, Bulganin, Mikoyan and Kaganovich, has in the past three years accomplished a peaceful revolution designed to bury Stalinism and strip the Communist system of the principal drags on its future growth. These drags, accumulated during 20 years of domination by Stalin were:
 - A. An absolute dictatorship based on naked police power.
 - B. A primary reliance on force and the threat of military power to achieve Communist ends.
 - C. The grim thesis of the inevitability of war.
 - D. An equally grim thesis on the necessity of violent revolution in every nation.

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IV. The Soviet leaders, after faltering in the face of stout Western political, economic and military resistance in the later years of Stalin's life and the immediate post-Stalin era, appear to have achieved a new political sophistication and are challenging the US and Western positions in world affairs with new and subtler weapons.

V. The three years since Stalin's death have been occupied in political, economic and military readjustments. These readjustments were designed to clean up the Soviet backyard and to eliminate the principal defects that were making the Soviet system unappealing politically and ineffective in diplomacy.

Mikoyan: "The leading collective body of the Party introduced a new, fresh course, pursuing a high policy of high principles, active and elastic....Certain ossified forms of our diplomacy, of our foreign trade and economic organs in their relations with foreign countries and the citizens of these countries, were discarded."

A. Politically, the Soviet leaders have worked out an internal balance of power based on the concept of "collective leadership"--which in Moscow does not mean "equality" among leaders but merely a system preventing the accumulation of absolute power in the hands of one man.

Mikoyan: "The principle of collective leadership is elementary for the proletarian party, for the Lenin-type party. However, we must emphasize this old truth because in the course of about 20 years, we in fact had no collective leadership. The cult of personality was flourishing--already condemned by Marx and afterward by Lenin--and this course could not help exerting an extremely negative influence on the situation within the Party and in its work."

B. Economically, the USSR has maintained priority of rapid growth of heavy industry, while trying to improve agriculture and consumer-goods output.

- C. Militarily, the USSR has kept its armed forces strong but has brought fighting in Korea to an end, and withdrawn forces from certain advanced positions--Austria, Port Arthur, and Porkkala (Finland).

VI. From the point of view of US problems, four main ideas expressed at the Party Congress stand out from the welter of words.

- A. These veterans of Stalin's cruel tyranny have at least outwardly committed themselves to "collective leadership." This is not likely to work indefinitely, but--while it does--it gives a flexibility to Soviet policy that may well make it more dangerous than the "hard-arteries" period of Stalin's last years.

Khrushchev: "The furthering of the Party's unity and the raising of the activity of its organizations demanded the restoration of the norms of Party life elaborated by Lenin, which have previously been often violated. Of primary importance was the restoration and complete consolidation of Lenin's principle of collectivity in leadership."

- B. "Peaceful coexistence" and denial of the "fatal inevitability of war" are policy-propaganda themes likely to last a good many years, because the Soviet leaders recognize that Stalin was making things easier for us by frightening small nations into cooperation with the US from a dread of general war or direct Soviet military aggression.

- 1. "Peaceful coexistence"--

Khrushchev: "There are only two ways: either peaceful coexistence or the most destructive war in history. There is no third way."

"It is common knowledge that we have always, from the very first years of Soviet power, stood with equal firmness for peaceful coexistence. Hence it is not a tactical move, but a fundamental principal of Soviet foreign policy."

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2. Non-inevitability of war--

Khrushchev: "War is not fatalistically inevitable."

3. These were the "sacred" texts before the 20th Party Congress:

Lenin (1919): "...the existence of the Soviet Republic side by side with imperialist states for a long time is unthinkable. One or the other must triumph in the end, and before that end supervenes, a series of frightful collisions between the Soviet Republic and the bourgeois states will be inevitable."

Stalin (1952): "In order to eliminate the inevitability of wars, imperialism must be destroyed."

- C. Most important for the future, the admission that the "transition to socialism" (in Soviet jargon meaning Communist control) may be achieved in some countries by peaceful parliamentary means is a signal for full speed ahead with the "popular front" in unstable political arenas like France, Italy, and Indonesia.

Khrushchev, Bulganin, Mikoyan and Kaganovich are gambling that they can push American influence off the Eurasian continent and perhaps right back home without war--by political, economic and subversive pressures alone.

Khrushchev: "The present situation offers the working class in a number of capitalist countries a real opportunity to unite the overwhelming majority of the people under its leadership....In these circumstances, the working class...is in a position to defeat the reactionary forces opposed to the popular interest, to capture a stable majority in parliament, and transform the latter from an organ of bourgeois democracy into a genuine instrument of peoples' will."

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Mikoyan: "By force of the favorable postwar situation in Czechoslovakia the socialist revolution was carried out by peaceful means. Communists came into power after having allied themselves not only with the parties of the working people which were close to them but also with the bourgeois parties which supported the common national front."

While some local Communists leaders have probably been shaken by Soviet repudiation of Stalinism, which they slavishly followed so long, they have a chance, now, to revitalize their parties and win back respectable intellectual and working-class support, previously dwindling because of the unfailing subordination of local interests to Soviet policy.

1. The policy line laid down in Moscow during these past two weeks will have many reverberations in Communist circles throughout the world. Already, there has been gratification in Yugoslavia and consternation in France.
 - a. Yugoslavia: The Tito regime finds the developments at the Congress much to its liking. The Yugoslavs have already been citing these developments as evidence of the correctness of their policies in the present international situation. The Yugoslav press has mentioned the extent to which the USSR has adopted views similar to Yugoslav doctrine, in particular, the existence of differing roads to socialism.
 - b. The French Communist Party, in contrast, has largely kept from the readers of its paper, L'Humanite, Moscow's repudiation of Stalinism and rigid ideological conformity.

The non-Communist French press is reporting proceedings fully and twitting Stalinist French Party leaders for having just two weeks ago expelled Pierre Hervé from the Central Committee for his views on fallible leaders and non-violent roads to socialism (remarkably similar to ideas voiced by Khrushchev.)

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- c. The Satellite press has given wide coverage to the Congress speeches, but has generally treated with caution all statements reflecting on Stalin's methods. These criticisms of Stalin combined with the Congress' official endorsement of "differing roads to socialism" will probably lead to additional problems in some Satellite parties, whose relatively undocctrinated rank and file may press for greater freedom than either Moscow or the Satellite leaders are willing to grant. In particular, Hungarian leader Rakosi's problem in restoring party discipline within the Hungarian Communist party may be intensified.
 - d. Communist China: Peiping is being polite, although some Chinese may feel Khrushchev's pretensions to being an ideologist lessen the stature of Mao Tse-tung, who is recognized as having "creatively interpreted" Marxism-Leninism.
- D. Finally, and also important for the future, the whole Soviet regime is dedicating itself to maintaining a rapid pace of development of industrial strength.

Khrushchev: "Statistics show that in a quarter of a century...the Soviet Union increased its industrial output more than 20 fold despite the tremendous damage done to its national economy by the war. Meanwhile, the United States, which enjoyed exceptionally favorable conditions, was only able to slightly more than double its production, while industry in the capitalist world as a whole failed to register such growth."

"The countries of socialism are giving unremitting attention to the development, above all, of heavy industry, which is the foundation for the continuous expansion of social production as a whole."

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Saburov: "It is true that we have not yet caught up to the United States in the volume of the quantity of industrial production per capita and, so far, in the general volume of industrial production...However, the pace of our development, which by many times exceeds the pace of growth in the United States permits us to overcome this lagging within a very short historic period of time."

1. The economic goals permit the USSR simultaneously:
 - a. To keep the home base solid and secure in both economic and military contexts, even though at some cost as regards standards of living.
 - b. To export capital to the places where it will do the most political good--especially to the ex-colonial countries anxious to industrialize rapidly and likely to adopt the Soviet model if treated gently and liberally for a while.
 - c. To distribute arms to countries abroad, wherever such action will cause the most mischief.

VII. Soviet leaders made it clear that the USSR's military strength will be maintained at a high level, although they emphasized that Soviet military power would be employed only defensively, or as a deterrent to Western initiation of hostilities.

Marshal Zhukov: "The USSR is protected by diverse atomic and thermonuclear weapons, powerful rocket-propelled and jet-propelled armaments of various types, including long range missiles."

Mikoyan: "There also exist, however, large imperialist monopolies such as the United States, to which war has brought no sacrifices, but on the contrary has been the source of super profits. These monopolies

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are not averse to unleashing a war, although the American people are against war. They are restrained, apart from public opinion and apart from the great military strength of the countries of socialism, by another new important circumstance. This circumstance is the appearance of atomic and hydrogen bombs not only in America but also in the Soviet Union, as well as the means to carry these bombs to any point of the earth by aircraft or rockets."

"...In the event of American aggression, hydrogen bombs can in return fall on American cities too..."

"Hydrogen and atomic warfare can bring about great devastation, but it cannot result in the destruction of mankind and its civilization. It will destroy the outdated and pernicious regime of capitalism in its imperialist stage. Communism has no need of war. It is against war; the ideas of Communist will triumph without war."

VIII. The policy themes stressed by Soviet leaders at the Congress are directed at:

- A. Reducing fear of Soviet resort to war to expand the USSR's sphere of dominance.
- B. Rendering more palatable Soviet and local Communist political methods, so as to facilitate the formation of popular front governments in non-Communist countries.

IX. Soviet policy is also calculated to enhance Soviet prestige in Asia and Africa. Khrushchev included "peace-loving" neutral states in both Asia and Europe, along with the Sino-Soviet bloc, in a vast "zone of peace" which now, and especially in the future, Soviet leaders expect to play a decisive role in world affairs.

Kaganovich: "Lenin, analyzing the prospects of world development, wrote 33 years ago: 'The issue of the struggle ultimately

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depends upon the fact that Russia, India, and China comprise the gigantic majority of the population, and it is just this majority of the population that has been coming together at an unprecedented speed in recent years in the struggle for their liberation. There cannot be the slightest doubt of what the final outcome of the world struggle will be. In this respect the ultimate victory of socialism is fully and undoubtedly assured."

"Now the whole world is watching this remarkable prophecy of the genius of mankind, Valdimir Ilyich Lenin, come true."

- X. As to the long-term implications, the tenor of Party Congress declarations shows that Soviet leaders think of "competitive coexistence" as a policy of considerable duration.
- A. It is highly unlikely that these men would have undertaken the delicate and potentially dangerous task of revising Communist dogma if they were contemplating only some short-term, narrowly tactical shift in line.
 - B. Communist policy is designed to slow down the growth of Western strength, and exploit weaknesses in the Western coalition.
 - C. At the same time, it is designed to increase Soviet influence on the world's uncommitted and neutralist nations, and to manipulate them in support of Communist foreign policy.
- XI. All the speeches of the Soviet leaders make it clear that the capture of power, establishment of "dictatorships of the proletariat," and the revolutionary transformation of society will remain the ultimate aims of Communist parties. Khrushchev's revisions of Communist dogma constitute mainly an admission that long-term Communist objectives can be reached by means hitherto considered unrealistic and for that reason wrong.

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XII. Finally, all the speakers at the Congress struck a note of deep confidence in the strength of the Communist world and in the inevitability of its ultimate triumph over capitalism. Examples:

Khrushchev: "The Soviet State is growing and gathering strength. It towers like a powerful lighthouse showing all humanity the road to a new world.... Our cause is invincible.... The future is ours.... Under the banner of the World-transforming teachings of Marxism-Leninism, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union will lead the Soviet people to the complete triumph of communism." (stormy and long applause turning into an ovation; all rise).

Mikoyan: "Not a single major international question can now be solved by the will of the Western Powers alone without regard for the views of the Soviet Union, China, and all the countries of socialism. In the minds of humanity, socialism is now incomparably stronger than capitalism. That is why it is not for us to fear a struggle between the ideas of socialism and capitalism. That is why our Party... so...openly declared that we are against war but in favor of competition between two systems, in favor of a struggle between the two ideologies under conditions of peaceful coexistence."

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